



An aerial photograph of a ski resort at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the snow-covered mountains and evergreen trees. A large resort building with a snow-covered roof is visible in the lower left. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds.

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SUN PEAKS: EVERYBODY'S SKI TOWN

*Mixing big-resort amenities,
expansive terrain and all-ages
accessibility, Sun Peaks Resort
shines as a crowd-pleasing
vacation destination*

By David Webb

As a tween, I joined our local Nancy Greene Ski League—likely a parental ploy to get me out of Mom and Dad’s hair so they could ski the steeps without a whining kid in tow. But bashing slalom poles on Vancouver Island’s Mount Washington Alpine Resort groomed my fundamentals and was key in keeping skiing a part of my life for 35 years and counting. It also instilled a reverence for alpine ski racers.

As an elementary student, I jogged alongside Canadian Olympian Dave Murray, member of the Crazy Canucks, as he passed my home with the Olympic Torch en route to the 1988 Winter Games in Calgary. I had a poster of Italian racer Alberto Tomba on my wall when other kids pinned-up Wayne Gretzky. Aside from wearing her name on my ski jersey as a kid, I’ve long admired Nancy Greene—respecting her early adoption of the Lange plastic ski boot when her peers were still wearing leather. And I’ll be glued to the TV in February as our #CanSkiTeam owns the podium.

So when a ski racing icon like Nancy Greene Raine (her married name) chooses to put down roots at a ski hill, it’s likely worth checking out. The hill in question is Sun Peaks Resort, one of the largest mountain resorts in the country, tucked away just north of Kamloops, British Columbia.

SET A 45-MINUTE drive from Kamloops in B.C.’s North Thompson, Sun Peaks had a modest intro to the ski industry. Up until 1993, it was known as Tod Mountain (the name of one of the three peaks from which the resort is now comprised). Little Tod hummed along, filtering in and out of business, largely in the shadow of other internationally known B.C. resorts like Big White and Whistler. The switch flipped in 1992, when Japan’s Nippon Cable Company Ltd. bought the property—recognizing a potential untapped by the three old chairlifts and the simple Shuswap Day Lodge. (Not coincidentally, Nippon also makes the cables used by most of the world’s chairlifts and gondolas.)

Development came fast and furious: new lifts, a golf course, hotels, apartments, expanded terrain... In 2014, Sun Peaks officially became the second-largest ski hill in Canada—yet it still hasn’t reached its tourism potential, severely lacking the crowds one would expect at such an expansive resort.

The village at Sun Peaks is the only designated mountain resort municipality in Canada—and, after incorporating just seven years ago, is also one of the smallest municipalities in the province. This outdoorsy community has just 371 permanent residents, for whom Nancy Greene Raine’s husband Al Raine is the mayor, while Nancy takes on the role of director of skiing at the resort. The power-pair also operates a hotel in-town, and Nancy is often on-slope when the senate

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Mountain Man Dog Sled Adventures.

isn’t in session (she’s a Canadian senator, too). She shows up on the hill for free drop-in ski sessions throughout the season—offering Olympic-calibre coaching to skiers both advanced and novice.

With some 1,700 hectares of skiing terrain and a full-service ski-in village, yet still a place where ski legends and Olympic racers hang around nonchalantly and lift lines are uncharacteristically short, Sun Peaks walks the line between mega-resort and low-key getaway. However, developers have a keen eye on the future with a laundry list of plans to expand tourism offerings. In short, the time to visit is now—before it gets too famous.

I HEAR BELLS. Jingle bells. Two Clydesdales pull a sleigh befit for a certain jolly



Sun Peaks offers a ski-in, ski-out village.

old elf toward the Sun Peaks Village Day Lodge. It's March, within a month or so of season's end, but the white stuff is piling up like it's Christmas. (And the sleigh bells help the vibe.) It's part of the village's winter wonderland charm—most of the streets in town are ski-through and much of the architecture conjures a German *Weihnachten* feel, with snow piling up on ornate eaves like we're surrounded by gingerbread houses.

Next to funky Kootenay towns like Nelson or Rossland, which have long and colourful histories that paint their mosaics today, Sun Peaks plays a bit of the straightman with a something-for-everyone motif rather than a live-to-shred ski-bum vibe. Which is why it's so popular with families, or, like on this late-winter weekend, for

couples like my wife and me.

My wife is usually more keen to follow the geese come winter. So, to ease her into skiing, it's vital to add in a full-service hotel, fine dining and peripheral activities like dogsledding, snowshoe tours (with s'mores) and the romantic sleigh ride that's about to tour us through the village. Add to that the massive terrain—read: variety—and it's little wonder why Sun Peaks attracts folks looking for a crowd-pleasing vacation. A vacation that, for us, starts with a horse-drawn sleigh to set the mood then leads into a dogsled ride through the cake-icing evergreen forest surrounding the resort before we even click into our skis.

Mountain Man Dog Sled adventures is the brainchild of Taryn and Chris

Schwankie. With their staging point just outside of town, this duo takes groups of tourists on daily sled runs up some 150 vertical metres of subalpine terrain to picturesque Little McGillivray Lake.

"It's incredibly interactive. It's peaceful and exhilarating all at the same time," Taryn explains as we harness the hopping-and-barking dogs and board the sled. With eight wiry dogs pulling three adults and a sled—my wife, me and Taryn—we move with impressive speed.

"The dogs are so happy doing what they're doing—their passion and drive is impressive. It's hard not to smile while you're out here," Taryn continues as we break at the lake to swap out passengers-for-mushers. These canines are obviously pleased to pull a sled. They whine when ▶

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Nancy
Greene-Raine.



we stop, yet dial-in a silent laser focus while we're running through the twisty, treelined path. Erin and I take turns at the helm, at times barely holding on as the pups' power downslope, our sled nearly getting airborne as he we hit a succession of humps. In fact, it's impossible not to smile.

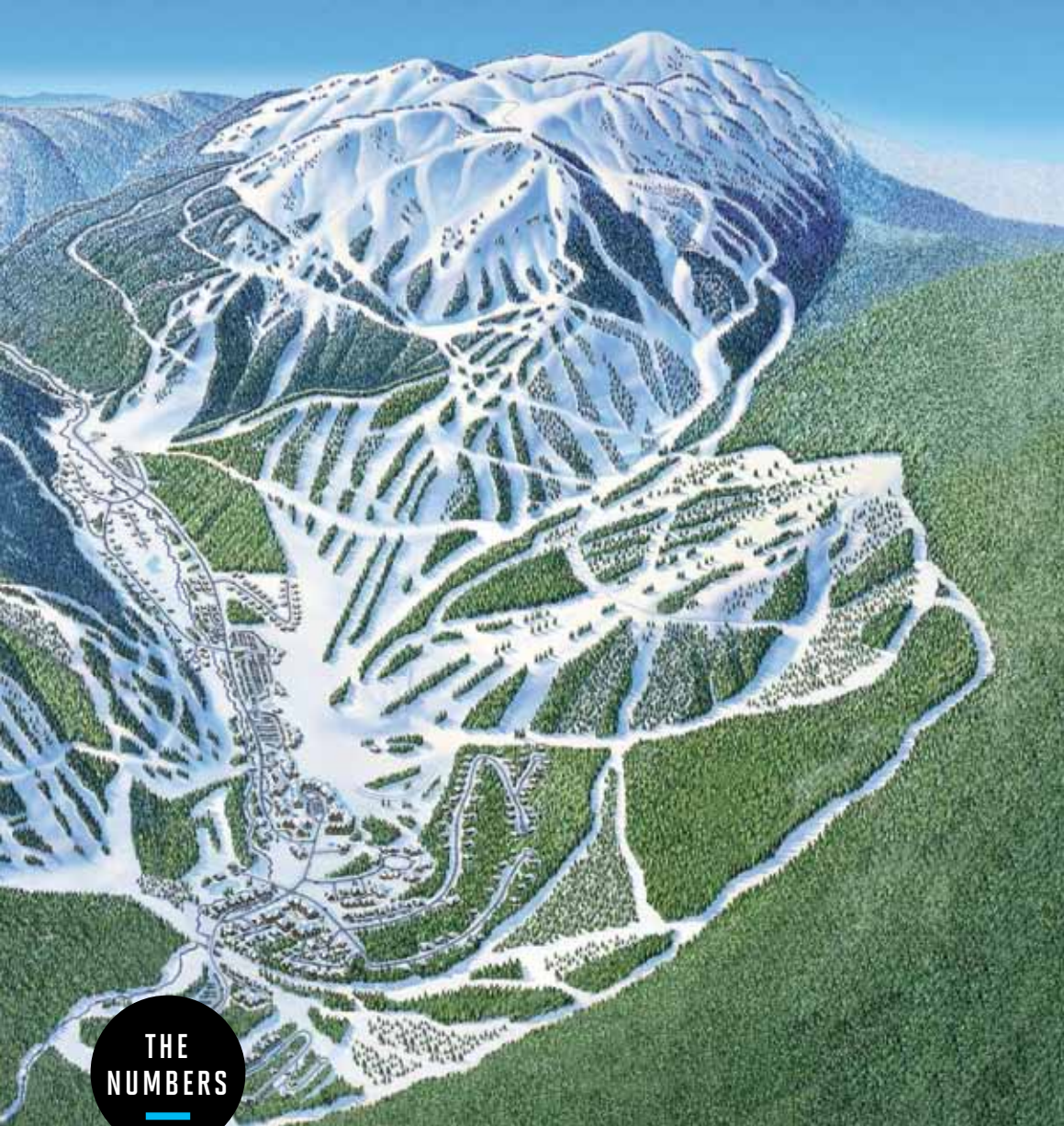
SLEIGH- AND SLED-RIDES are peripheral. I'm here to ski. An unexpected late-season dump has coated the hill in nearly a foot of fresh. The mountains' rollercoaster

groomed runs are etched in corduroy and the glades and bowls are billowy. Sun Peaks, for all its family-friendly tourism offerings, is a skier's hill at heart.

We start on the Morrisey Express, a quad-chair leading to the 1,675-metre summit of Mount Morrisey—actually the stubbiest in this massif triad. With my wife still building her skills, we compromise (you know what that means) with a ramble down The Sticks, which turns out to be the most entertaining green run

I've skied since outgrowing greens when I was still single-digits. Speckled with stands of spruce, it begs the advanced skier to practice swooping carves, using the evergreens like a GS course, while novices meander behind. Ample cruisy blues also lead from Morrisey's summit—Out of the Woods, Second-Growth, I Dunno—with a progression of difficulty ideal for inspiring confidence.

The Sunburst Express leads from the Day Lodge to a midpoint on Tod Mountain. With an easy run dubbed Cahilty flanked by black-diamond steeps like Sting and Intimidator, we both find what we're looking for. (Can't let this powder go to waste.) The following morning, with more new snow, we continue our journey—having only skimmed the surface of two of the resort's three peaks in a day. The Sundance Express chair takes us to a 1,730-metre namesake peak on the resort's east side. Once again catering to all abilities, Erin chooses the easy Rambler,



IF YOU GO

Heading to **Sun Peaks Resort**? Buy tickets, reserve accommodations, book tours and more at sunpeaksresort.com.

Stay at the luxurious **Sun Peaks Grand Hotel and Conference Centre** and enjoy ski-in convenience and walking distance to all restaurants and shops. sunpeaksgrand.com

Visit the **Adventure Centre** to book a variety of après ski activities—from a **Horse Drawn Sleigh Ride**, to the **Moonlight Snowshoe & S'mores Tour**, to a **Winter Segway Tour** and more. Located inside the Village Day Lodge. sunpeaksresort.com

Tackle the "Into the Wild" tour with **Mountain Man Dog Sled Adventures** and climb some 150 metres of elevation by canine-power—even learning to mush your own sled. mountainmanadventures.ca

Voyageur Bistro crafts the village's best eats with classic Canadian staples like bannock, bison, game and regional fish. voyageurbistro.ca

Looking for an après pint? Head to **Morrissey's Public House**, in the Sun Peaks Grand Hotel, for craft beer and heaping nachos. sunpeaksgrand.com

Bolacco Cafe is where locals go to get coffee and the best sausage rolls in the Okanagan. (Located in the Coast Sundance Lodge.)

THE NUMBERS

3
mountain peaks

1,728
hectares of skiable terrain

12
lifts

135
marked trails

882 M
vertical

40 KM
of Nordic trails

2,080 M
top elevation

600 CM
annual snowfall

later moving to the intermediate Three Peaks, while I alternate between coaching her ever-improving turns and ducking off to black-diamond Peak-a-Boo or the billowy Bug Out Glades.

My day finishes on Mount Tod as I bomb down never-ending Munro Ridge run to the old Burfield Chair, which takes me on an epic 22-minute ride from the west-side base to near the 2,100-metre mountain summit. This is the land of snow ghosts and black- and double-black steep-and-deeps that show off what the resort offers an advanced skier—including the in-bounds backcountry of Gil's Hill. In keeping with Sun Peaks' something-for-everyone vibe, however, any newbie can enjoy this vista from a couple thousand metres of elevation before cruising the 11-kilometre-long green-circle groomer to the Day Lodge.

UNDER A MOONDOG on a night so crisp it feels like the air would break

with the swoop of my hand, we march from the village and through the Nordic area on our guided Snowshoe & S'mores trek. The full moon reflects off untouched snow; it's so bright we can turn off our headlamps and still see every undulation. Ahead, we'll have a campfire, s'mores and hot apple cider. Tomorrow, we'll cruise home to Vancouver along the high-pass Coquihalla Highway. Behind us, we have a weekend of mountain memories. But for now, we're mindful and present in this frigid winter night. We meet new friends from B.C., the rest of Canada and the U.K; we enjoy the silence of a mountain after dark.

It's easy to love Sun Peaks. Epic terrain and a gamut of additional activities mean couples and families can tailor a getaway that fits them right. And Sun Peaks makes it easy to love winter—turning snowbirds into snow-bunnies with every season. 🐾